

## Interview with Dorothy Jester

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CONSUL GENERAL DOROTHY JESTER

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JESTER: My first post was Munich, Germany, where I arrived in February, 1946. You can imagine what it looked like. Just rubble covered with snow. But the occupying Third Army took care of people who had arrived to reopen the American consulate general. We were housed in apartments taken over from the Germans and we ate three meals a day in the Army Mess, which formerly was the Haus der Kunst, the art museum. Whatever became of the art we never knew.

I was the only woman in a group of men, not only from the consulate but from the Army, who took the written exam for the Career Foreign Service in September of 1946. In December I was delighted to learn I had passed, but I then had to wait until June of 1947 to take the oral. This was administered by a panel of five men, headed by the legendary Joe Green, who later gave me the happy news that I had passed. But because of budgetary restraints, I could not become an officer and move from my annual salary of \$1,800 to a princely \$4,300 until June of 1948.

*Q: What happened next?*

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JESTER: I was assigned to Mexico City as a junior Foreign Service officer on loan to the United States Information Agency. It was because State was still short of funds, or so I understood, that about 100 FSOs were lent out to other agencies. But I really enjoyed the work of scholarship exchange, essentially screening young Mexican candidates for in-service assignments in some of our government agencies, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Public Health Service or the Department of Agriculture. I helped other students get undergraduate or graduate education in the United States with the help of the Institute for International Education in New York.

*Q: How long did you stay in Mexico City?*

JESTER: Until 1951, when I was transferred to the American consulate in Mexicali, up on the California border. There I issued visas and passports until 1954, when I was glad to be sent to Managua, Nicaragua, as an economic officer. I was the second in a two-officer economic section, reporting to the Department mostly on agriculture, trade, and labor matters.

*Q: How long were you there?*

JESTER: Just a year and half, and then I was transferred back to Germany, this time to Bonn.

*Q: And when would that have been?*

JESTER: In 1956. I stayed in Bonn, as assistant commercial attaché, until 1958, when I was transferred to the Department of State for a four-year tour. In 1962, I went to Santiago, Chile, to do economic reporting. On the way to Santiago, by ship, I learned I had been promoted to FSO-2, which was the reason I was only there for a year and a half. The inspectors recommended that I be transferred to a smaller post where I would be head of an economic section. This meant the embassy in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

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*Q: And how did it work out?*

JESTER: It was fine for about a year and a half. Then, you may recall, there was a rebellion on the island, resulting in American troops being sent in by President Johnson in 1965. All economic work stopped, and the ambassador put me in charge of evacuating American civilians. I remember being on duty at the embassy for 36 hours straight to get the evacuation underway. As things were brought under control, the decision was made to expand the contingent of the Agency for Economic Development, whose local director would also head the embassy's economic section. Ergo, I was surplus. But I was delighted to learn that I was transferred back to Mexico City.

*Q: From Mexico City, you retired. In what year was that?*

JESTER: I retired officially on November 30, 1971.

*Q: November 30, 1971. Fine. Now let's go back to the more personaaspects of your beginnings.*

JESTER: I was born in Mesa, Arizona, in 1914, but lived in El Paso, Texas, until I was about 10, when my family moved to Los Angeles, California. I attended Stanford University, majoring in Spanish. Then I taught it for three years at Anaheim Union High School. At the end of that time I was offered tenure, but somehow it did not appeal to me to stay in that small town the rest of my life. This was well before Disneyland.

So I turned the tenure down, and just by great fortunate coincidence, almost the same day, I received a letter from a friend in the Education Department at Stanford telling me that some Stanford people who were running the American School in Quito, Ecuador, were looking for teachers. Was I interested? I was, and I went to Quito and taught fourth grade for a year. If I had stayed a second year I could have had my way paid back to the States, but I found the 10,000 feet of altitude pretty hard to take. Luckily, at the end of the year I met an engineer from the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. He told me the Bureau

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was opening an office in Lima, Peru, asked me a few questions about my background and whether I could take shorthand. When I said I could but didn't claim to be fast, he said I could have a job if I wanted it. It was the answer to my prayers!

*Q: Well, you said you taught Spanish. Did you start learnin Spanish in E1 Paso?*

JESTER: I learned a lot of Spanish listening to my bi-lingual mother, who had been raised in Mexico. When I got to high school and took Spanish my teachers seemed pleased with my accent. So I decided to major in Spanish and teach it in high school.

*Q: So already by the time you hit Quito, you were perfectly at homewith Spanish.*

JESTER: I was fluent, and it helped too with the job in Lima. There I lived with girls who worked in the American embassy. Through them I met other embassy personnel, even attended some embassy parties. I decided early on that when I got back to the United States I would apply for an embassy job. It was January 1945 before I returned.

*Q: 1945?*

JESTER: Yes, the war was still on. As I had promised myself, the first thing I did was apply to the Department of State. While I waited for an answer, I took a job with an export company in Los Angeles. Sometime in late summer a college friend called and invited me to ride with her across the United States to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to pick up her husband, now back from overseas.

From Fort Bragg, I took the train up to Washington. Checking in at the State Department, I was told that there was no money for new hirings. However, I was encouraged to stick around because the situation could change. So I got myself a job in the press section of the Pan American Union. Four months later, in January, I was called by State with the news that there was a new appropriation from Congress to reopen the consulates in West Germany. In February 1946, I left for Munich.

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*Q: Can you tell me what year you started in Quito?*

JESTER: It was 1941. I was there when Pearl Harbor was attacked. I remember breaking into tears over the news. I was away from my country when it was in trouble, and I could do nothing.

*Q: Then Lima.*

JESTER: Yes, I was in Lima from 1942 until January, 1945.

*Q: Yes. Was it your experience in Quito and Lima that directed your attention toward the Foreign Service?*

JESTER: Oh, yes. Definitely.

*Q: Well, let's then continue on with Munich. Tell us a little about Munich.*

JESTER: I was one of the first three women secretarial staff to arrive. Incidentally, we were in a military plane that had to land in a snowstorm. They actually talked us down by radar, believe it or not. After getting settled in some temporary military housing, we went to call on the consul general, a real character named Parker Berman. Did you ever hear of him?

*Q: No.*

JESTER: As he looked us over, he asked if anyone could take shorthand. I spoke up and said I could a little. I'd been doing it in Lima after more or less teaching myself. So I was his secretary for the two years I was in Munich. I had really hoped to be one of his vice consuls. But when I had mentioned this to a personnel officer in the State Department, he had said that unfortunately because I was a woman even my two college degrees were

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not enough. But he encouraged me to apply to be designated to take the Foreign Service exam. If I passed, I would be on a par with the men.

*Q: You passed it.*

JESTER: Yes, I took the written in September 1946 and learned in December that I had passed. But I had to wait until June of 1947 to take the oral from a panel that had been around the world, with Munich its last stop. Then, once I had passed the oral, I had to wait until March of 1948, another nine months, to be sworn in as a junior officer. Again, the Department was short of money for officer positions. Isn't that something?

*Q: Yes. I wasn't in the Department in those days. Anything more of your experiences in South America?*

JESTER: I'll never forget one experience in Lima. One Sunday in 1944, when the war was still very much on, I got caught in a sudden build up of surf at the beach at Herradura (which means horseshoe) and found myself tiring terribly as I struggled in the huge breakers. Suddenly, an arm appeared to get me through the swollen surf to the beach, where I sank in exhaustion.

It was George Munro, an embassy officer, who had been swimming out beyond the surf and happened to see me silhouetted in the breakers. George had been kidded as giving aid to the enemy for saving a couple of Japanese girls the week before. Now he was fully forgiven for having rescued an American.

*Q: Did you go down to Callao?*

JESTER: Yes, a street car went to Callao, the port, and I had friends there. I was too poor to see very much of Peru. I did not get to Iquitos, for example. But I did get to a small town in the mountains. By mountains, I mean it was by road up to, and way beyond, 16,000

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feet. I remember once getting out of the car at that altitude and having my knees literally buckle under me. There just was not enough oxygen to stand up on.

*Q: Were you going to La Oroya?*

JESTER: Yes. How did you know?

*Q: I spent six years in La Oroya.*

JESTER: You did, really?

*Q: Let's go on to Munich. That must have been a very interesting time there.*

JESTER: It was. As I said, I became the consul general's secretary, and so I didn't have to work on visas. In the front office, of course, I got in on special cases. I can't think of any particular one right now, but they nearly always involved "displaced persons," as refugees from the war were called. All were trying to get to the United States.

*Q: That was before the Marshall Plan?*

JESTER: That was definitely before the Marshall Plan, which was announced, I think, in the summer of 1947. Almost overnight you could see a change. Suddenly, goods appeared in store windows that had not been there before. Apparently, there had been some hoarding. But it really sparked the Germans. You know, they are hard working to begin with.

*Q: Did you know German or learn German?*

JESTER: I studied it with a little German professor, and I got up to the "useful" level. You know, the Department had ascending grades of one through five. I was about five in Spanish but only three in German.

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*Q: Well, then you got to use it again when you got to Bonn.*

JESTER: Right. But in Bonn, as assistant commercial attache, my work was mainly with American businessmen seeking information or contacts. I didn't need German so much at work. It was useful socially, however.

*Q: Then from Munich did you go back to Mexico City?*

JESTER: No, it would be the first time in Mexico City.

*Q: 1948 to 1951. What was your responsibility there?*

JESTER: As I mentioned earlier, I was assigned on loan to the U.S. Information Agency, and I worked on student exchange programs. When I was assigned to Mexico City later in my career, I was to see examples of the impact of such programs. I remember once at a cocktail party being introduced to a doctor who was head of the national mental health hospital. He said, "Oh, Miss Jester, you sent me to Johns Hopkins!" I think I was diplomatic enough to say, "No, doctor, you sent yourself. I only took care of the paper work." I met others who had become bank presidents or were being sent out as ambassadors to Japan and other important countries. It really was a program with impact.

*Q: Right. I think you already mentioned what satisfaction you got from your job there. Now to Mexicali.*

JESTER: Yes. There I had a consular assignment issuing visas and passports. Incidentally, I also got a letter from the personnel office of the State Department saying, "Miss Jester, I hope you understand that when you are in Mexicali you will not be in charge when the principal officer is away, even though you have the rank of consul (as FSO-5), because the Mexicans would not understand. Taking charge will be the vice consul, Mr. Williams." Some years later, I learned that a copy of the letter was sent to the supervising



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consul general, Carl Strom, who responded with a blistering letter to the Department. But the old meanie didn't send me a copy.

Q: Do you think that was motivated by the attitude in the Department toward women generally in the Foreign Service, or was it really a concern of the Mexicans?

JESTER: That's the way it was expressed, that the Mexicans would nounderstand.

*Q: Is there anything more about Mexicali. Did you have any particulaexperiences that you want to talk about?*

JESTER: No, not that I recall. It was rather nice being in Mexicali for almost three years, because from there it was only a relatively short drive up to South Pasadena, where my mother lived. Then the Personnel Department of State asked if I would like an economic assignment for my next post. I said it sounded great, and so I went as a junior economic officer to Managua.

It was a two-man economic section. About nine months after my arrival, number one was transferred and I moved up. A vice consul named Donald Easum soon arrived to help. Did you ever hear of him?

*Q: Easum with an S? I ran into him in Madrid.*

JESTER. Right. Well, Don Easum was brand new to the Service but was smart as a whip. He had delayed his entry into the Foreign Service until he could finish his Ph.D. in economics. He was immediately an effective officer, and really personable. He has remained a good friend.

*Q: Did you have any educational preparation? Did you major ieconomics at school?*

JESTER: I never even had a course in economics. But in the Foreign Service you learn on the job. When I was assigned to the Department in 1958 I took night classes in economics

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at George Washington University, and I soon learned that I could hold my own with graduate students because of my practical experience in the field.

*Q: What was the state of our relations with Managua at that time, in the 1950s?*

JESTER: It was fine. You may remember a story of Roosevelt talking about Somoza, the dictator, saying, "Yes, he's an SOB but he's OUR SOB." Actually, he was a very nice person face to face. I'll tell you my first experience with him.

The day I got to Managua, the ambassador invited me to a party he was giving that evening for the president and his wife and just the embassy staff. I arrived to find chairs and tables around the swimming pool, with a sheltered area at one side for the honored guests and the ambassador and his wife. At one corner of the pool, there was a small band of musicians. The president always took music with him.

As we happily dined in the lovely tropical evening, the band launched into Mexican music, specifically "Jalisco!" (That is the name of the state of which Guadalajara is the capital.) I had just come from Mexico where I had learned the guitar and many Mexican songs, so I could not resist joining in. Suddenly, I noticed the ambassador summoning me over. He said the president wanted to talk to me. He asked me how I happened to know the song, and I repeated what I have just told you. Then he asked me to go up and sing it with the orchestra. I still have a picture of myself singing into the mic.

About three weeks later, the Foreign Service inspectors were in town. My housemate, Florence Finne, who was the administrative officer, were at a table with the inspectors at a big party given by the president at the Casino Militar. There was a large orchestra playing. Suddenly, we were aware that President Somoza was walking across the dance floor to our table. He reached for me and took me up to the orchestra, where he and I together sang "Jalisco!" He would break lustily into the chorus but would have me sing the verses. I'll bet you have never met anyone else who sang a duet with a president.

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He was personally very nice. When I was transferred from Managua, the ambassador, Tom Whelan, who was a potato farmer from North Dakota, a man so informal he would not ride in the back seat of his limousine but always up front with the chauffeur, told me we had to go say goodbye to the president, who was again very gracious.

*Q: Well, Bonn is next.*

JESTER: Bonn, of course, was much more formal. I was surprised to hear our German employees, who had known each other for years, still address each other as Herr and Fraulein. Our informality as Americans must have been hard for them to understand.

*Q: What was the embassy like, or was it an embassy? Wasn't it mission?*

JESTER: No, it was an embassy by then. The ambassador was James Conant from Harvard, a very able person, who was succeeded by David Bruce, another wonderful man. Both were political appointees.

*Q: Then you had four years in the Department?*

JESTER: Yes, in the Department I was assigned to the Bureau of Economic Affairs, where I worked on the PL 480 program. That was the program under which we sold U.S. surplus agricultural products to third world countries and took payment in their currencies, which in turn we would use in their countries for our embassy and other expenses. It was a good program, very good. I don't know if it is still in existence.

*Q: How did you like the Department, I mean as contrast to the field?*

JESTER: I liked it, but I was always interested in getting to the field again. I bought a home. The dumbest thing I ever did was to sell it when I left after four years, instead of letting it be rented and appreciate in value. That house, which I paid \$25,000 for, I sold for

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\$32,000. I think it would be worth around \$300,000 now. But I guess I'm not the only one with that kind of story.

*Q: No, I'm another one, but you selected a good location.*

JESTER: Oh, yes. It was just off Reno Road between Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues, a three-bedroom red-brick colonial two-story house.

*Q: Anything else about the Department?*

JESTER: I remember Ed Martin was head of the Bureau of Economic Affairs. He was friendly and approachable. I also remember Douglas Dillon, who was also in State at that time. I recall once having to get something cleared by him. I went in with some fear and trembling, but he was very nice. The work also involved some contact with other embassies. For example, if we were selling wheat to a third world country, we had to be sure it would not...

*Q: Step on Canada's toes?*

JESTER: Right. Canada or Australia or whatever. We made sure to clear with anyone that might be affected.

*Q: Well, Chile.*

JESTER: In the embassy in Santiago, I was number two in the Economic Section under a nice fellow named Tom Favel. The work generally involved reporting on local business conditions, trade, the mining industry and agriculture. About a year after my arrival, we had a visit from the Foreign Service inspectors. As I may have mentioned, I had recently been promoted to Class Two. The inspectors decided I was too high ranking for the position in Santiago, and so they recommended a transfer to a post where I would have my own economic section. This turned out to be Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

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*Q: Until they landed the paratroops?*

JESTER: Right.

*Q: Well, the Dominican Republic, you say, was in Johnson's administration?*

JESTER: Yes, this was shortly after the Trujillo regime, and there was an interim government headed by a triumvirate, the chief of which was Donaldo Reed (or Donny Reed, as everyone called him). He was quite a nice person, but he was unable to hold things together, and the place blew apart.

*Q: How was the man who later was ambassador in Saigon, Bunker?*

JESTER: Ellsworth Bunker, yes. He was sent down to the Dominican Republic to help straighten things out. An impressive man. I was so happy that I got to know him. I remember that he later married a Foreign Service officer named Carol Laise. I never met her. Did you?

*Q: Yes, I did.*

So it was Santo Domingo till the end of 19657

JESTER: Not quite. I think I left there about late September, but was headed for Washington to serve on the Selection Boards.

*Q: Then to Mexico City, in January 1966, back to your old stompingground.*

JESTER: Right, January 1966. I was number two in the very large economic section, but four years later I moved up to be head of the section, assuming the title of Counselor of Embassy for Economic Affairs. That's the title I had when I retired.

*Q: Tell me a little bit about the business relationships with Mexico at that time.*

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JESTER: They were fine. I felt we had really good relations with the Mexican government through the various ministries we routinely had contact with. I remember a conversation I had with an officer in the Ministry of Finance, who got on the subject of relative military budgets. I reminded him that Mexico did not need a big military because it had the well-armed United States right above it. He was happy to agree with me.

At times, my job involved helping businessmen, but only if it was something that the commercial attache felt had a potential problem of a broader economic nature.

For a while, I was the only woman on the ambassador's country team, but later another female officer named Margaret Hussmann arrived to be the supervising consul general, responsible for the work of the embassy's consular section as well as that of six or seven consulates in other Mexican cities.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

JESTER: He was Robert McBride, a career officer. Yes, I really enjoyed Mexico. I liked it so much that I was not ready to return to the United States when I retired. So I moved to the second largest city, Guadalajara.

*Q: Did you?*

JESTER: Yes. I lived there for 10 years and got to be very active in the American Society and in a group organized to raise money for the symphony. I had many friends among both Mexicans and Americans. We also had a good bridge club. All in all, it was very pleasant.

*Q: What, if any, one experience stands out in your recollection?*

JESTER: I can't think of any one experience, but the totality of experiences in Mexico was, for me, the best. I loved Mexico. I still do. However, I don't want to go back to Mexico City,

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because the beauty of the city is gone. It is so contaminated. When I was there for the first time in 1948, you could see snowcapped volcanoes on any day that it wasn't raining. Now it is a rare sight. It is a shame, but that enormous growth had to bring its problems.

*Q: I wonder if we could get back to the subject that we have talked about a bit, the position of women in the Service.*

JESTER: Right.

*Q: Perhaps you could...*

JESTER: Well, when I went in I understood that there were maybe half a dozen women Foreign Service officers. In fact, when I passed the oral exam in Munich, I later was told that each of the five men on the panel was polled separately, each voting in my favor, until the last man was reached, a former Civil Service commissioner. He stood up and shouted, "Whoopee, I'm vindicated! Apparently, he had been teased for voting in favor of other women candidates who had not passed. They had teased him about being charmed by a nice smile or good legs.

*Q: That was in 1947?*

JESTER: Yes.

*Q: Did you see a change in the corporate view of women as years passed?*

JESTER: I must say that women were never, in my recollection, openly deprecated or insulted.

*Q: No sexual harassment?*

JESTER: No, no. There was never anything such as we hear of now in the work place. I certainly never encountered any.

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*Q: And did you, particularly in the earlier years, feel you were at home in the embassy?*

JESTER: Oh, yes. The embassy became a very close unit, as you know. You'd be transferred to another post and always find someone there who knew someone where you had been, and you were old friends immediately.

Q: I found that, too. As a matter of fact, I also found very good quality among officers and staff. Some of the secretaries to ambassadors deserved a lot of credit.

JESTER: Thank you for letting me participate in the Oral History Program.

End of interview